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The edges of the nation: A research agenda for uncovering the taken-for-granted foundations of everyday nationhood

From violent internecine conflict and the creation of new nation states to national holiday celebrations and world cup football, scholars of nationalism have long been drawn to the bells and whistles of nationalism. Britain's departure from the EU and the rise of populist movements in Europe and the United States will attract the attention of the next generation of nationalism scholars. This kind of nationalism cannot be ignored. This is nationalism on steroids: a juiced up and sometimes menacing nationalism that grabs newspaper headlines and begs scholarly explanation. But as effective as these sorts of nationalist fireworks are at attracting attention, they are, ultimately, fireworks: intermittent bursts of nationalist fervour that punctuate an otherwise flaccid, humdrum nationalism, the nationalism of everyday life.

Nationalism doesn't simply disappear between these fireworks, but it does fade from view, receding into the fissures of everyday life, guarded from the gaze of prying eyes. This is of course Michael Billig's (1995) banal nationalism. Billig helped redefine the scholarship on nationalism by arguing that nationalism's power rests not (only) in its ability to attract attention, but equally importantly in its ability to *not* attract attention (see also Edensor, 2006: 529). In established nations, the nation is everywhere, it's our 'endemic condition' (Billig, 1995: 6). 'In so many little ways', Billig tells us, 'the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in the world' (Billig, 1995: 8). But '...this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding' (Billig, 1995: 8). This is nationalism in settled times (Bonikowski, 2016): Unseen, unheard, unnoticed, this kind of

nationalism operates off the radar. It's everywhere, yet discernible nowhere; it becomes camouflaged against the backdrop of the ordinary. It works its magic not through flag waving, but through flags hanging limply, stealthily concocting a world of nations unselfconsciously and uncritically imbibed as part of the taken for granted order of things. These limp flags are not a metaphor for the nation's impotency, but for its potency.

But whilst we have come to appreciate the power and significance of banal nationalism, we have been less successful in generating evidence of how it actually works. There's a paradox here: if the nation is unseen, unheard, unnoticed, then how do we know this (see also Jenkins, 2011: 146)? How do we know that we don't see it, we don't hear it, we don't notice it? Indeed, how *can* we know this? The purpose of this paper is to outline and develop a research agenda for addressing this evidence problem. Drawing on insights from ethnomethodology, I elaborate a breaching strategy for laying bare the taken-for-granted foundations of everyday nationhood. I look to the edges of the nation: those moments, spaces, and contexts where the nation vacillates between the explicit and the implicit, where its taken-for-granted dimensions can be more readily coaxed out with a well-placed breach.

I begin by considering this evidence problem more fully: we have some good leads for where to search for this tacit nationalism, but we haven't yet uncovered evidence of it. Next I elaborate an ethnomethodological(-ish) remedy to this problem: how we can use breaching to elicit evidence of an otherwise taken-for-granted nationalism. I then consider three edges of the nation where breaching can be exploited. First, I look to the spatial edges of the nation, the borders (and border-crossing practices) that can make an otherwise

implicit nationalism explicit. Second, I turn to the temporal edges of the nation, the historical and developmental moments when nationalism vacillates between its hot and banal variants. In the third section, I consider the political edges of the nation to show how certain political discourses and symbols prime the nation, making it more accessible for viewing. These (and many other potential edges) provide a strategic vantage point for breaching the nation so that its otherwise taken-for-granted foundations can be momentarily revealed. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on the added value of a breaching approach: what it brings to our understanding of everyday nationhood that more conventional national identity research misses.

This article doesn't solve the evidence problem; rather, it only suggest one way we might begin to solve this problem. My purpose here is to elaborate a research agenda that doesn't rely on data, but instead outlines a framework to generate data. (I do, however, pinch some examples from others to illustrate the possibilities for such an approach). By identifying this evidence problem, and offering but one possible remedy to it, my aim is to develop an agenda for future research into this heretofore underexplored realm of an unselfconscious nation.

The evidence problem

A new generation of nationalism scholars has begun to look beyond nationalism's pomp and circumstance in search of some of its more mundane forms. Billig (1995) locates this banal nation in limp flags and media discourse. Tim Edensor (2004, 2006, see also Jones and Merriman, 2009) has described how the familiar iconographies that dot the unremarkable roads we travel subtly remind us of our place in a national world; for Michael Skey (2015: 9-

10, see also Ichijo and Ranta, 2016) it's the national emblems adorning our bacon, broccoli, and beer that turn everyday shopping into a national jamboree; and Yves Déloye (2013: 624-27, see also Jones and Merriman, 2009: 303, McNeill and Tewdwr-Jones, 2003: 738) has written about how the nation is etched into architecture and reverberates in music, 'imbuing the private lives of citizens with banalized references to and markers of national identity.' Still others have located the nation in various quotidian practices, from drinking tea in Japan (Surak, 2012) and chewing qāt in Yemen (Wedeen, 2009) to washing up in Sweden and Denmark (Linde-Laursen, 1993) and driving in Britain (Edensor, 2006). Studies like these confirm the ubiquity of an unselfconscious nation, located, but at the same time concealed, in the mundane contexts, practices, and rhythms of everyday life (Edensor, 2006, 1993, Lofgren, 1989, Eley and Suny, 1996). We're seldom nations of flag wavers, we're not frothing at the mouth in collective national exuberance. But we are drinking tea and washing up. This nation has been domesticated (Déloye, 2013: 616, 618), invisibly, if not invidiously, reproduced as part of the taken for granted order of things.

This kind of nationalism has gone underground. It's there, just beneath the surface, underpinning the social order without requiring, or indeed even permitting, any tinkering (for other subterranean metaphors, see Skey's 2011: 12-13 use of 'sedimentation', see also Edensor, 2006). This is the realm of the unselfconscious, the unreflexive: nationhood not as an object of purposeful manipulation, but as an underlying and unspoken set of assumptions about the way things are (Fox, 2004b: 13-14). Tim Edensor (2002: 88-98, 2006: 532) described this as a kind of national habitus: a set of 'popular competencies', 'embodied habits', and 'synchronised enactions': 'everyday forms of practical knowledge [that]'are rarely the subject of any reflection, for they constitute part of the normal

competencies required to sustain a livelihood and a social life' (Edensor, 2002: 93, see also Bentley, 1987: 33-40, Billig, 1995: 42, Déloye, 2013: 618-19, Kuipers, 2012: 19-25, Wise, 2010: 922-34, Wodak et al., 1999-29). The 'practical mastery' of these competencies 'does not require consciousness of their objective bases' (Bentley, 1987: 33); rather, internalised and naturalised habits, in a specifically national register, provide a known but unseen template for confronting and negotiating the challenges the social world throws at us. Nationhood in all of these views 'operate[s] mindlessly, rather than mindfully' (Billig, 1995: 38).

To 'national habitus', Christian Karner adds 'national doxa' (2005: 223-26, see also Bourdieu, 1977: 164-65) as the experience of the 'natural and social world... as self-evident'. Ghassam Hage (1998: 50-55) prefers 'national cultural capital' as a repertoire of competences that users acquire through nationally imbued practices and habits. In a different vein, Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1999, see also 2001: 62-63) has elaborated a 'life-world' approach to understanding the contextual and often unreflexive experience of national identity. Michael Herzfeld (1997) employs the metaphor of (cultural) 'intimacy' to capture the privately shared but taken-for-granted knowledge and modalities of being national. There's also the 'implicit nationalism' of Hassin *et al.* (2009, see also Ferguson and Hassin, 2007, Carter et al., 2011): 'nationalistic cues' that subliminally activate national ideologies which in turn influence thought and behaviour. And from a cognitive perspective, 'race', ethnicity, and nationhood are naturalised as 'deep-seated' social categories of human kinds that operate in an 'unselfconscious and quasi-automatic' manner (Brubaker et al., 2004: 51), below the radar of conscious reflection and manipulation (Brubaker, 2009: 32, see also Hirschfeld, 1998, Gil-White, 1999). The success of this nationalism rests not upon commitment and

attachment, but indifference and apathy; the people in whose name it speaks silently ignore it, submitting to its invisible power (Carter et al., 2011: 343-44).

These insights have transformed the way we think about, and study, nationalism, diverting attention away from the fireworks of nationalism, and refocusing our gaze on its banal reproduction. But what actually constitutes evidence of banal nationalism? How do we actually know that banal nationalism lurks in these hidden crevices of our subconscious thoughts and actions? The flags hang limply (Billig, 1995: 40-41, see also Skey, 2015), but how do we know that people *don't* notice them? And that by not noticing them, they are making us compliant national subjects? The national lexicon saturates media discourse (Billig, 1995: 94-95), but how do we know we uncritically imbibe that lexicon in ways that reproduce a world of nations (Carter et al., 2011)? We drive down our national motorways (Edensor, 2004, 2006) across our national landscapes (Löfgren, 1993); we pass our national architecture as we listen to our national composers on the radio (Déloye, 2013); we even stop to drink our tea (Surak, 2012) and wash our cups and saucers as nationally specific practices (Linde-Laursen, 1993). But how do we know all of this 'operates mindlessly' in some national sense?

We have an evidence problem. All of the evidence conjured up by Billig and friends has been on the production side of the equation: the tattered flags and homeland deixis; the telephone boxes and traffic signals, the music and architecture (see Skey, 2009: 335-36, Billig, 2009: 347). These sites and sounds of the nation have been extensively catalogued (Skey, 2015); they supply the banal reminders, or flaggings, of the nation in everyday life. But the evidence we're shown is of the reminders; not how we're actually being reminded

(see also Hearn, 2007: 659, 666). 'Because it is usually unreflexively apprehended as part of "second nature"', Edensor (2006: 528) reminds us, 'the everyday is not easily available for analysis' (see also Skey, 2009: 334, Billig, 1995: 38, Eley and Suny, 1996: 21-22, Hearn, 2007: 658-59). Limp flags, national iconographies, music, architecture all provide clues about where we might locate banal nationalism 'out there'. But how might we unlock those clues to see how banal nationalism gets 'in here', in our unspoken, unreflexive understandings of the (national) order of things (Hassin et al., 2009)?

Breaching everyday nationhood

The challenge is to generate evidence of everyday nationhood as it operates as an unselfconscious disposition (see Jenkins, 2011: 141-44, Skey, 2011: 34, see also Condor, 2000: 183-84, Karner, 2005: 224-28). Just because we can't see (or hear) it doesn't mean we should abandon our attempts to uncover it (see also McCrone and Bechhofer, 2015: 12-15). I want to go beyond simply postulating that we are nationalist dupes (see Antonsich, forthcoming 2015, but also see Billig, 2009: 348-49) to actually showing that, at least in some sense, we are nationalist dupes.

There are plenty of scholarly traditions interested in unreflexive, embodied, taken-for-granted forms of knowledge. There's the common sense knowledge of phenomenology, the building block for Berger and Luckmann's (1967) social construction of reality; there's the cognition, categories, and schema found in cognitive anthropology and experimental psychology (D'Andrade, 1995, Strauss and Quinn, 1997, Hirschfeld, 1998). On the macro side we have culture, lifeworlds, and ideology all effectively but surreptitiously guiding thought and action. And bridging the gap between the micro and the macro is of course

Bourdieu's (1977) habitus. All of these approaches are preoccupied with how common-sense competencies undergird and inform knowledge in action.

I take inspiration from ethnomethodology's 'background expectancies' (Garfinkel, 1967b): the 'socially standardized and standardizing, "seen but unnoticed," expected background features of everyday scenes... [which] entitle persons to conduct their common conversational affairs without interference' (Garfinkel, 1967b: 36, 41-42, see also Skey, 2011: 34-35, 2010: 721, Thompson, 2001: 21, 28-30). Background expectancies operate behind the scenes of everyday life to make the received social order intelligible. Garfinkel figured that one way to get at this stable social order was to upset it. This is what breaching was about: 'a procedure... to modify the *objective* structure of the familiar, known-in-common environment by rendering the background expectancies inoperative'; 'to start with the familiar and ask what can be done to make trouble' (1967b: 54, 37, emphasis in original). Upsetting the unspoken order of things requires that order of things to be spoken to restore it, *status quo ante* (1967b: 42). Breaches of ordinary but otherwise unspoken rules of social intercourse, like standing too close to someone or facing the wrong way in the lift, could be set right by simply making those rules explicit. Garfinkel devised ways to upset a more elaborate social order, such as tasking his postgrads with presenting themselves to their parents as strangers (1967b: 47-49). The strategies worked: they produced discomfort, consternation, bewilderment, and, following that, repair work (adapted here from conversation analysis; see Schegloff et al., 1977). The person facing the wrong way in the lift is asked to turn around; the daughter presenting herself to her parents as a stranger is told she is their daughter. These are things that don't normally need to be

said; when they are said, we are afforded a glimpse into the otherwise unreflexive netherworld of background expectancies.

Ethnomethodology has not featured prominently in the scholarship on ethnicity and nationalism (for exceptions, see Hester and Housley, 2002b, Moerman, 1988, see also Brubaker et al., 2006). Some standoffishness is probably not unwarranted.

Ethnomethodology's focus on micro-interactional moments might appear to offer little to historians interested in the unfolding of nationalism over the *longue durée* (see, eg, Smith, 2008, but see also Van Ginderachter's [2016] use of 'proletarian tweets' - short, colloquial messages published by rank-and-file Belgian Workers Party members in their local party paper - as evidence of the 'hidden transcripts' of vernacular nationalism in 19th century Flanders). Others have criticised ethnomethodology for its supposed empiricism (Atkinson, 1988: 452-54), an (unintended) consequence of its preoccupation with the minutiae of ordinary talk and interaction as the building blocks of the social order .

These concerns cannot be dismissed. But potential liabilities for ethnomethodology can also become potential assets when redressing some of the blind spots of the scholarship on (everyday) nationalism. A healthy dose of ethnomethodological empiricism might be useful to help fill the evidence gap of an unselfconscious nation. My purpose however is not to endorse or defend ethnomethodology as a fix-all for the scholarship on nationalism, nor is it to employ ethnomethodology in a strict, orthodox sense. Rather, I take inspiration from ethnomethodology's narrow and specific focus on breaching to help think anew about one possible way to remedy the evidence problem of an unselfconscious nationalism.

I therefore would like to consider how breaching could be used to uncover how the received social order is also, at least in part, a received national order (see Skey, 2011: 34, see also Condor, 2000: 183-84; 196-99). That social order needs to be breached not only to get at its national dimensions, but also to concretise those national dimensions in the repair work undertaken to restore that order. This might include explicit references to 'the nation', but it could also include invocations of other mutated and improvised forms of 'the nation'. Indeed, it's through repair work that the multiple, complementary, and sometimes contradictory modalities of banal nationalism come in to view (Linde-Laursen, 1993: 276-77).

If the nation is part of our 'endemic condition' (Billig, 1995: 6), then our social *cum* national world is surely routinely breached. But how can we observe these breaches so that the repair work that follows makes those national dimensions of our social world explicit? Is it enough to select our vantage points next to limp flags and road signs and simply 'wait and listen' (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008: 556-57), hoping to observe and then record naturally occurring breaches? Such an approach risks turning us into nationalist twitchers, trying to catalogue that rare breach. Others have looked for breaches in the data they already have. Michael Skey's (2011, see also 2010) focus group discussions about immigration, for instance, included reports of breaches. In one example, holidaymakers returning to Manchester express dismay when met by a border agent in a 'yashmak': "'I'm coming back off my holiday into my own country'" and there's this lady standing there, telling us what to do' (Skey, 2011: 78). Their taken-for-granted expectations of what a national border agent should look like were breached when the one they encountered was wearing a niqab; the

story, retold in the focus group, sets straight who belongs, and who doesn't, to the British nation.

But as compelling as these and other stories like them are, they are still second-hand breaches – stories people tell about breaches rather than the breaches themselves. This is perhaps why Garfinkel preferred to go out 'make trouble' (1967b: 37). What, then, is the national equivalent of facing the wrong way in a lift? Jumping a queue, perhaps? Queuing is a quintessentially British practice, and it's also eminently breachable (though not for the faint of heart; see Fox, 2004c: 154-55). We might also look to Tim Edensor's (2004, 2006) nationally specific driving practices. These are not the Highway Code's rules of the road, but the unspoken and nationally specific driving norms that govern our everyday automobility (Edensor, 2004: 111-17). These norms can also be easily breached, for instance, by driving on the right/(wrong) side of the road – something sure to elicit multiple kinds of repair work.

Indeed, it's not difficult to identify the sites and practices of banal nationhood: the flags, architecture and roadways that populate our everyday landscapes, and the norms, rules, and customs underpinning talk and interaction (see especially Fox, 2004c on the latter). These banal features of the landscape are nationalism's cultural artefacts; the mundane practices its ideological habits. Some of these artefacts and habits are even breachable: flags can be burned, queues can be jumped. But: How can we be sure that the repair work that ensues will be nationally inflected? Jumping a queue might earn us 'There's a queue here!', but probably not 'There's a *British* queue here!' Driving on the wrong side of the road would surely prompt any number of invectives, but nationally explicit ones? These and

many other practices may be commonly understood as nationally specific practices. But if they're not generating nationally inflected repair work, we're no closer to that elusive evidence of the otherwise hidden world of banal nationalism.

The edges of the nation

One way to cheat, to tip the breaching scales in favour of nationally explicit repair work, might be to look to the edges of the nation: the places, times, and contexts where the nation is on the periphery – the edges – of our consciousness where it can be (more readily) lured out with a carefully concocted breach. In what follows, I elaborate a research agenda for breaching everyday nationhood at the spatial, temporal, and political edges of the nation. Breaching the nation at its edges is one strategy for solving the evidence problem for banal nationalism by turning unselfconscious suppositions about how our national world operates into explicit articulations and practices of repairing, and thereby constituting, the nation.

1. *The spatial edges of the nation*

Let's begin with the queuing example again. It's a recognisable British practice, but one that, if breached, is unlikely to elicit a response that invokes its explicitly British dimensions. If we do it at Heathrow, however, where the queue jumper is more likely to be seen as non-British, an implicitly British practice stands a better chance of being interpreted as an explicitly British one. This happened with Michael Skey's holidaymakers: the same niqab on the same woman (minus the uniform) on a crowded street in Manchester would probably not be seen as a breach. Context matters: at the airport, an ambiguous breach becomes a

national breach. It's the airport as an institution marking national boundaries that makes both the understanding of the breach and the repair work that follows it explicitly national.

Airports, seaports, and land borders are situated on the spatial edges of the nation. They lend their national parameters to our awareness of the things happening around them (Donnan and Wilson, 1999). Time spent waiting to cross borders is a time of anticipation that evokes national sensibilities, priming our taken-for-granted national suppositions about the world and readying us for the imminent transition into another national universe. It's this liminality of airports and borders (Donnan and Wilson, 1999: 64-67) that is exploitable through breaching. Queuing, but also standing around, walking, eating, hurrying, being stressed and anxious – all the things people do in airports – exhibit nationally specific embodied competencies (Edensor, 2002: 89, 2006: 532, Surak, 2012: 175-76). They are also framed by the banal national iconographies of airports – the signage, flags, and shops peddling national kitsch (Coțofană, 2011), and the airport architecture characterising (and sometimes caricaturising) national styles and traditions (Weiss, 2010). These otherwise ambiguous practices and features become the signs, symbols, and habits of the nation when they're marking the edges of the nation.

Airports are also important sites for the transgression of multiple (state-endorsed but also commercially mediated) borders (see Adey, 2008). Inter-*national* travel becomes a routine modality for breaching national boundaries and the national sensibilities they contain (Edensor, 2006: 533-39). States and the borders that delineate them provide containers that shape and organise experience (Giddens, 1985: 13, Mann, 1993: 59-61, see also Sahlins, 1989). Crossing those borders, particularly as tourists when we carry our national

assumptions as excess baggage, can make those implicit national sensibilities explicit. 'A confrontation with different cultural codes', explains Tim Edensor (2002: 89, see also Dolby, 2004) 'can reveal... a heightened sense of awareness towards what seemed common sense.' Tourism as a practice can help turn unselfconscious suppositions about how the national world operates into explicit articulations of repairing the nation.

But borders do not hermetically seal nations within their states: the extent to which transgressions are experienced as breaches will vary between borders and from individual to individual (see, eg, Jones and Merriman, 2009: 166-69). The seasoned business traveller, for instance, becomes indifferent to difference, moving through a more blended cosmopolitan space (see Devadason and Fenton, 2013: 477-78, Hannerz, 1996: 107-08). Similarly, plane loads of British holidaymakers disgorged in Costa del Sol who search out, and find, their bangers and mash and favourite lager at their 'local' English pub showing the Chelsea-Arsenal match are also desensitised to sanitised national difference. And people who live near, and regularly cross borders, also tend to operate with more muted national sensibilities (Paasi, 2001: 18-25); national difference in such borderlands becomes normalised (Berdahl, 1999).

The potential of borders to make national sensibilities explicit is attenuated by the routinisation of border transgressions. This is the 'anaesthetizing influence of habit' (Proust, 2013: 8), where senses dulled by routine are ineffective at registering breaches. But before we decry the demise of national boundaries, we must recognise that for many people crossing national borders is still experienced as a rupture. Nadine Dolby (2004) describes how US study abroad students arriving in Australia for the first time had to contend with

American national identities that had until then held little explicit relevance for them. Encountering national difference not only made them more aware of their Americanness, but, through the repair work they did to defend themselves against their interlocutors' less forgiving views on the US, reinforced that Americanness. 'It makes you, by just having to reevaluate things, or rethink things,... it makes you stronger in what you believe', explained one student (2004: 167).

If it's breaching we're after, then we should try our luck with neophytes like study abroad students or the occasional tourist, for whom border crossings are more likely be jarring (see Hannerz, 1996: 104-05). This might involve following travellers into their new landscapes of national unfamiliarity, but it could also entail positioning ourselves at the airports and seaports on the edges of the nation. Arrival halls of international terminals provide one promising venue for observing these moments of national separation. Whilst the routine traveller confidently and seamlessly enters her new national environs, the unseasoned traveller stumbles and bumbles into a new national landscape, haplessly searching for familiar cues to orientate herself. The effortless negotiation of a familiar national space at home becomes effortful in a new and unfamiliar national space. Arrival and departure halls – both sides of the national border – provide us with promising vantage points for observing these moments of national transgression.

2. *The temporal edges of the nation*

Harold Garfinkel's (1967a) study of 'Agnes' explored how she reconciled her new female anatomy following gender reassignment surgery with her past male biography. 'Agnes' had to master the embodied habits and gendered practices of being a woman, and also learn to

take those habits and practices for granted. First generation immigrants are the national equivalents of 'Agnes', laboriously, but imperfectly, acquiring the habits, customs, and norms of their new nations (Sapiro, 2004: 6-7, see more generally Gordon, 1964).

Most of us don't have to learn new nations as immigrants, but all of us learn our own nations as children. The temporal edges of the nation are found where the nation is still being learned, before it has become second nature. It is only when we are fully socialised into our nations that we take them for granted in the way Billig describes; children have to learn to take their nations for granted (Koh, 2010: 17-18, 127-28). When I ask my five year old son (born in Bristol to a Hungarian mother and an American father) whether he's British, Hungarian, or American, he responds, 'I'm Bristol!' This reflects Noel's proto-national, common-sense understanding of the world around him, not the imagined community of the nation still unimagined by him. Noel and children his age have to be told what a nation is (and what their nation is) and what it means to have a national identity (and what their national identity is) (see Jenkins, 2011: 205-24). We are not born into our nations, we have to acquire them, and that process of acquiring a national identity is an arduous one. This is early childhood socialisation, when children are still learning the embodied habits (and habitus) of the nation (Koh, 2010: 17-18, Throssell, 2015: 42-44, Barrett, 2007: 20).

Child development is an ideal laboratory for breaching the nation, before children fully grasp or articulate what a nation is; this is the temporal edge of the nation when banal nationalism is becoming banal (see Barrett, 2007, Barrett and Oppenheimer, 2011, Koh, 2010). Here I take inspiration from Katharine Throssell (2015), who combines child socialisation theories with social psychological and phenomenological approaches to

examine how children in France and England become national. Her interviews with schoolchildren revealed a kind of national naiveté, a willingness to put into words the sorts of self-evident things that adults (or even older children) struggle with. When 8 year old Claire was asked how she knew she was French, she blithely explained, 'I was born here in France, in Chartres..., Chartres is a town... Chartres, we live in France, but in Chartres. Chartres is a town and France is a country. [So] I'm French of Chartrain origin' (Throssell, 2015: 257-58). Claire stated the obvious – or rather what is patently obvious to just about anyone older than Claire. That's why such things do not need to be said by adults, or why, if they are said, they sound odd. But it's not obvious to Claire, so she is happy to make explicit for her what is obvious for others. Claire and children her age are 'less cynical and in turn more aware of the background noise of banal nationalism' (Koh, 2010: 28). Research on early childhood socialisation lays bare some of the more fundamental, pre-submerged elements of national belonging (see Koh, 2010: 5, 28, Throssell, 2015: 18-19) before they become lost to the realm of the taken-for-granted.

These temporal edges of the nation are also manifested in historical time. Billig's transition from hot to banal nationalism (1995: 43-51) represents the historical moment when established nations are being established, when France's peasants are still becoming Frenchmen (Weber, 1976). Whilst breaching in the past poses certain challenges, we can direct our attention to nations in the making in real time, nations still establishing themselves, where the nation is still on the tip of our tongues. South Sudan may be too new, its nationalism still red hot. But what about the new states of the former Yugoslavia (see, eg, Robinson and Pobrić, 2006)? These countries are moving beyond the fireworks displays and firebrand rhetoric, the internecine conflict and nationalist tensions, and are

now comfortably settling into the boring, banal, and befuddled middle age of nationalism (Bonikowski, 2016). Countries like the former Yugoslavia still transitioning into this middle age provide interesting sites for retrieving some of those faded, but not too faded, memories of hot nationalism through breaching experiments.

We don't only have to look to new nations, though, since nations are constantly being made and remade in ways that open multiple cracks between hot and banal nationalism (see Karner, 2005: 224-25). The trajectory from hot to banal nationalism is not always linear. John Hutchinson (2004, 2006, see also Connor, 1994) challenges evolutionary interpretations of nationalism with a more rhythmic, episodic interpretation of nationalism, replete with ebbs and flows, cul-de-sacs and derailments, and thwarted ambitions. Hutchinson (2004: 135-49, 2006-304, see also Jones and Merriman, 2009, Malešević, 2013: 124-37) has described how wars, famines, and mass migrations can stir national populations out of their banal complacency, triggering temporary returns to periods of hot nationalism. To this we can add a more recent concoction of refugees, immigration, and terrorism (all suggestively portrayed as linked by a resurgent radical right) to reignite nationalism, often in pathological forms, across Europe and North America. These 'time bubbles of nationalism' (Collins, 2012) are occasions for the heightened awareness and experience of national belonging – an awareness, however, that ultimately fades as national hot air is released from its bubble. The attack on New York in September 2001 was met with an outpouring of nationalism, expressed through the display of millions of flags (Collins, 2012: 385-86, see relatedly Löfgren, 1993: 189). But 'as time passed, the extraordinary became assimilated into the ordinary, and the American consciousness absorbed these changes as a part of a new standard in flag bearing' (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008: 548).

The banalisation of nationalism over the *longue durée* therefore does not preclude occasional outbursts of hot nationalism (Billig, 1995: 46-49), but neither does it mean that banal nationalism loses its relevance in times of hot nationalism. Indeed, even hot nationalism can become banal when it becomes repetitious and predictable, and is reproduced unreflexively (Li, 2013: 85-86, Fox, 2013: 48). This vacillation between hot and banal nationalism is further blurred by multiple, often unpredictable responses from nationalism's many audiences, tuning some in whilst leaving others unmoved (see Benwell and Dodds, 2011). The boundaries between an unselfconscious banal nationalism and the pomp and circumstance of hot nationalism are thus not always so readily discernible either in historical time or between individuals (Jones and Merriman, 2009: 166, Li, 2013: 70-89). But if we direct our attention to some of the aftermaths of these hot historical blips, when nationalist fervour is still receding back into the crevices of the ordinary (Skey, 2009: 340-41), then we can at least increase our chances of tapping into the thereafter banalised residue of hot nationalism.

3. *The political edges of the nation*

The political nation is everywhere, but nowhere: our politics are always national, even (especially) when they're *inter*-national, but not always in ways that make those national foundations explicit. Most of the time, the nation assumes a background role: it supplies and names the territorial and administrative limits for debate on issues ranging from education and the environment to transport and taxation, but without requiring us to focus our mental energies on those specifically national dimensions. Some issues, like immigration, however, are more nationally primed than others (see Karner, 2005).

Immigration presents itself as one big breaching experiment, as a (national) 'crisis' that requires our immediate attention (see Karner, 2005: 224-25). Immigration is a provocation: it challenges our cherished notions of who we are, and it does so in an explicitly national register. It reminds us who we are, and who we aren't, not infrequently with racialised and exclusionary inflections; it reinforces our national norms of behaviour, values, and cultural practices; and it lays bare our nationally specific sense of justice, revealing who's deserving and who's not.

It does all these things because immigrants are breachers, *par excellence*, stepping on our national toes at every turn. When immigrants tread on our values, offend our culture, and commit injustices, they transgress the boundaries, the edges, of the nation. In doing so, they reveal what's on the other side: how we define ourselves as a nation. Amanda Wise (2010) has shown how East Asian immigrants in an Australian suburb offended local residents' taken-for-granted rules of social intercourse. Wise describes this as a 'rupture' of these residents' habitus (in the parlance of ethnomethodology, a breach of their background expectancies) (2010: 923-27, see also Karner, 2005: 224-25). It was the obligation of the 'native' to reassert the dominance of her own nation (Wodak et al., 1999: 8, 33). Local residents thus responded by explicitly reinforcing the social rules (see also Skey, 2011: 80-82) that embodied and preserved their privileges, even whilst espousing a rhetoric of multiculturalism (Wise, 2010: 926-27, see also Hage, 1998).

When immigrants are admonished for their transgressions, the nation is made explicit and its foundations are fortified. From the perspective of experimental psychology, this is 'system justification': the quasi-automatic defence and legitimation of the dominant

ideology when that ideology is perceived to be under threat (from a critical discourse analysis perspective, see Wodak et al., 1999: 8, 33, 36-37, de Cillia et al., 1999: 153, 156-57). 'System justification', Carter, Ferguson, and Hassin (2011: 344) explain, 'helps to create... popular complacency.' These are the nationalist dupes of banal nationalism (but see Billig, 2009: 348-49), with the difference that we now see them being dupes.

Methodologically, politics at the edges poses perhaps fewer challenges than the other edges. That's because the topic itself functions as the breach. Michael Skey's (2011: 66-91, see also Wodak et al., 1999: 108) questions about immigration to focus group participants elicited all manner of repair work to specify and defend national culture. In Robin Mann and Steve Fenton's interviews with working class Bristolians (Mann, 2011, Mann and Fenton, 2009, Fenton, 2007), talk about immigration transformed indifference to the nation to strong affiliation or *disaffiliation* with the nation. For 'Brian', a Bristolian caretaker in his late 50s, immigration was the trigger for him to reclaim and bolster his British national identity. 'If you're white', he began,

you feel threatened, and I feel like I'm threatened in me own country you know and I think, it's like you got to be ashamed to be British,... I feel like that I'm sort of British and proud of it, well why shouldn't you feel proud of it?' (Mann and Fenton, 2009: 526).

The topic of immigration functions as a breach, inviting the interviewee to rescue his besieged national identity.

But whereas Mann, Fenton, and others uncovered 'breaches' in their research participants' talk about immigration, I am proposing that immigration be used as a breach by research

design. Questions about immigration can be posed not (only) to elicit talk about immigration, but, via repair work, people's understandings of their nations. Other topics might also prove fruitful. In the UK, devolution, and more recently, Scottish independence, provide fertile ground for tapping into people's otherwise self-evident assumptions about what the nation is (Condor, 2010: 528-29). The EU is another kind of breaching machine, as was strikingly revealed in the UK's recent vote to forsake it for the purpose of reclaiming Britain's cherished national sovereignty. The EU's supra-national logic furnishes a direct challenge to the otherwise taken-for-granted national foundations of the world. When these and issues like them are politicised as (national) crises, they provoke otherwise dormant national sensibilities (Karner, 2005), thus making them explicit. Our task as researchers is to find the specific issues that push people's national buttons.

A second political edge of the nation is symbolised by flags. Flags are also eminently breachable: they can be desecrated (an act of protest), inverted (a sign of distress), or manipulated in countless ways for commercial or other purposes in ways that sometimes jar our otherwise settled notions of the nation (Eriksen, 2007: 8, 12-13, Jenkins, 2011: 141-49, Malešević, 2013: 133-37, Butz, 2009: 784-85). The American flag, for instance, is a preferred target of protesters wielding incendiary ambitions (Welch and Bryan, 1996). The American flag is not perpetually sacred, but holding a lighter to it makes it momentarily sacred. Combustible threats to the flag function as breaches, making the inviolability of the flag explicit in the repair work that follows. Flags can also breach national sensibilities in other ways. Until recently, national flags in the UK were breached when they were appropriated by fringe political groupings with dubious national credentials – the Union Jack by the British National Party and the Cross of St George and the English Defence League (on the varied

and often negative associations with British and English flags, see respectively Groom, 2007, Mann, 2012). Recent events have ushered in a symbolic renaissance of British (and English) flag-waving, but in the not so distant past, these unsanctioned appropriations of flags were seen as tarnishing them with noxious and decidedly un-British and un-English connotations. These were breaches of the nation that occurred at the edges of mainstream politics. Repairing them was not achieved by reclaiming the flag (that wouldn't have been seen as very British; see, eg, Mann, 2012, Condor, 2000), but rather by disowning it (see more generally Condor, 2000: 187-93).

Lately, however, a revival of British flag-waving is challenging this standoffishness, a process that has culminated with the resurgence of a proud and even boastful nationalism. '[Y]ears ago they didn't... fly the flag', explained one of Michael Skey's focus group participants 'because they didn't fucking have to. We knew who we were' (Skey, 2010: 729) But when that sense of national self feels questioned, flags and other symbols can be re-appropriated to restore the nation to its former glory. 'Maybe we're just trying to show', rationalised another focus group member, 'that there is still an English identity' (Skey, 2010: 729). In these accounts, reclaiming the flag – not, shunning it – does the restorative work. But the effect is the same: the boundaries of the nation – who belongs, and who doesn't – are clarified and reaffirmed.

Methodologically, what might these breaches look like? Here one can imagine presenting images of unconventional uses of flags to see how interview and focus group participants respond. Political psychologists have experimented with similar techniques in more controlled settings (and with somewhat different agendas) (see Butz, 2009, see also Hassin

et al., 2009, Kemmelmeier and Winter, 2008). If the present aim is to generate evidence of the content and contours of an otherwise tacit nationhood then perhaps a more discursive or narrative approach to data collection might be more appropriate. In her research with schoolchildren in the UK and France, Katharine Throssell asked pupils what they would do if someone burned their national flag. 'I'd die, 'cos I love England!', Kaitlin, an eight year old English girl, responded emphatically. To the person burning the flag, she would say "'I HATE you', I'd kill them. Because I love my country.' But when asked to explain her responses, Kaitlin could only muster 'I don't know'. 'This inability to articulate' her unequivocal objection to flag burning reveals the already taken-for-granted and embodied nature of this knowledge. Flag burning offended her national sensibilities; the repair work that followed was swift and violent, but not eloquent (Throssell, 2015: 271-72, 278-79 [emphasis in original]). Research into these and other unconventional uses of flags can reveal both the limits of the nation (which uses of the flag are, and are not, acceptable) and the content of the nation (how breaches of those limits are discursively repaired).

Conclusion

My aim in this article has been to come up with strategies for making the implicitly national explicitly national, to peel back the veneer of everyday life that obscures our view of a common-sense nationhood. I've tried to do this by turning to the edges of the nation, where the implicit is almost, but still not quite, explicit. The examples I've elaborated are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather evocative of the sorts of places, or edges, where we might be able to uncover banal nationhood. This does not mean that there is a fixed boundary between a taken-for-granted, banal nationalism, and a more explicit, purposeful hot nationalism (on the relationship between 'controlled and conscious processes' and

‘automatic and less conscious’ mental processes, see, eg, Devos and Banaji, 2005: 463-64, Butz, 2009: 781-82). People are not always nationalist dupes. They are also thinking, sentient beings, capable of manipulating the nation in creative ways to suit their particular purposes. But sometimes they are dupes, on autopilot, with the nation supplying them with a pre-programmed cognitive map for negotiating a complex social world. The boundaries between hot and banal vary from individual to individual and fluctuate in response to what’s happening in the world (Jones and Merriman, 2009: 165-66, Li, 2013: 70-89, see also Cohen, 1996).

Scholars of nationalism have become proficient at generating evidence of the hot variety of nations, the nation as a discursive construct, as a practical accomplishment, as an object of self-conscious and purposeful manipulation. It’s the banal kind, the invisible and inaudible version of that same nation that is somewhat trickier to find. It’s this second version I’ve been after in this article. I’ve argued that if we focus on those things happening in the world that might breach the nation – what I’ve been calling the spatial, temporal, and political edges of the nation – then we can at least increase our chances of tapping into the otherwise hidden national world of the banal (see Skey, 2006). By scratching the surface of these edges I’ve been trying to give myself an edge, a slight advantage, to increase the chances of eliciting some nationally explicit repair work. If I can do that then I think I will have succeeded in uncovering a bit of everyday nationhood, not just from the production side of the equation (for which we’ve already had ample evidence), but now also on the consumption side – some national habitus, some banal nationalism as its experienced (or not) by the unwitting targets of nationalism, ordinary people in their everyday lives. And this then begins to address our evidence problem, giving us a glimpse into the heretofore

unseen inner workings of the nation as an unselfconscious disposition. Breaching is not a panacea for this evidence problem, nor is it the only way to generate evidence of an otherwise taken-for-granted nationalism. But it is one way.

Yet: Why go to all this trouble? If it's people's unspoken assumptions about the nation we're after, why not just ask them directly? After all, there's a long, rich tradition of doing just that. Qualitative (and sometimes quantitative) research on national identity has been posing these questions to would be nationals in different contexts for decades (see McCrone and Bechhofer, 2015, Wodak et al., 1999, for review articles, see Cerulo, 1997, Bonikowski, 2016). For my purposes, however, these approaches, whilst not without their merits (and also with different objectives) have three limitations. First, many people find it difficult to talk about the things that are most obvious to them (unless they're seven years old). Direct questions about national identity often produce consternation: scrunched foreheads, quizzical looks, hemming and hawing, and even evasiveness (Condor, 2000: 184-86, Lofgren, 1989: 15). (Ironically, it's the quasi-automatic responses to even more direct survey questions that perhaps get us closer to respondents' raw, pre-thought understandings of the nation; see Li, 2013: 120-24, see also Fox, 2004a: 378-79, Bonikowski, 2016: 11). When I tasked my undergrads with interviewing their flatmates about their national identity (to demonstrate the consternation such questions sometimes cause), they came back with responses like 'I hardly ever thought about it', or 'It's a question I don't know the answer to' (see also McCrone and Bechhofer, 2015: 52-54).

Just because people have difficulty articulating national identity doesn't mean there's no value in giving them an opportunity to try to do so (McCrone and Bechhofer, 2015: 12-14;

55-57). So researchers dig deeper. Sometimes this probing elicits the clichés that lurk behind scrunched foreheads: ‘Roast dinners on a Sunday, pubs, cricket. History such as the royal family, fish and chips, seaside’ (from my undergrads; see also Condor, 2000: 185-86, Lofgren, 1989: 14-15, Antonsich, forthcoming 2015: 8). Others are more thoughtful, more reflexive. It’s often these more eloquent articulations and impassioned invocations of the nation that receive the most attention from identity researchers.

Second, interview questions are decontextualised, or more precisely, the context for such questions is an artificial research setting (see Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008: 555-57, Condor, 2000: 194, Hester and Housley, 2002a: 7-11). Whilst interviewing can shed light on these otherwise inchoate forms of national identity, they do so in ways that bear little resemblance to the conversational and interactional contexts of everyday life. The nation is meaningful *in situ*, when it’s connected to the world around us (see Thompson, 2001: 21-22). Interviews miss out on this context, or at best get it second hand in the stories people tell.

Third, explicit articulations of the nation collected in national identity research are not always a good predictor of people’s unselfconscious national beliefs and habits (Devos and Banaji, 2005: 453-57, see also Hassin et al., 2009-43, Condor, 2000: 183-85, 196-99, see more generally van Dijk, 1992, Goffman, 1959). What people say about the nation is not necessarily the same as what they think about it. If it’s national habitus that drives talk and interaction, then it is important to understand not only what that habitus is but also how it operates.

A breaching approach addresses all of these shortcomings. First, the bewilderment and confusion caused by breaches – the identity detritus that is often expunged from interview transcripts – is in fact key evidence of how nationhood is an unselfconscious disposition. This is the whole point: to create confusion, elicit bewilderment, to ‘make trouble’ in Garfinkel’s more mischievous formulation (1967b: 37). We know we’ve succeeded when our research subjects are left speechless; this inarticulateness is evidence of the nation’s taken-for-grantedness (Condor, 2000: 195, Skey, 2011: 6, Jenkins, 2011: 146-47). Of course we still hope that they struggle to put some of that confusion into words, to reclaim their national footing – that’s the purpose of the repair work. But breaching is interested in both the befuddled and bespoken forms of everyday nationhood: the consternation produced by breaching, and the discursive articulation to restore the right and proper (national) order of things.

Second, breaches occur in context. Indeed, breaches begin with context. That’s what all these edges are about. As such, breaching is capable of showing us knowledge in action, the nation as practice. Breaching gives us the content of the nation in the contexts where it matters. Third, breaching gets us closer to people’s unselfconscious understandings of the nation, unfettered by the beliefs, values, and opinions they espouse when provided with the opportunity to reflect more fully on such matters. Breaching allows us to sidestep explicit claims about national identity to get at some of the more taken-for-granted, unrehearsed, and thus uncensored, invocations of the nation.

I’ve thus tried to elaborate a more systematic research agenda for uncovering these multiple contexts and contents of the nation as a taken for granted fixture of the landscape

of things. This approach is not without its limitations and biases, some of which have been rehearsed above. More work is needed to develop breaching – and other – strategies. But by breaching the nation at its edges even in these few ways, we are afforded a first peek into how the nation works its magic behind the scenes of our everyday lives.

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